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ABSTRACT

Among the recommendations of the "Nation at Risk" report (1983) was that a core curriculum of four units of English, three each of science, social studies, and mathematics, and a half unit of computer science be required. Between 1982 and 1992 the percentage of high school graduates earning the recommended units in core courses increased sharply, from 13 to 47 percent, an increase that occurred for both sexes and for all racial and ethnic groups. For private school graduates, the number rose to 66%. Over the same period, the percentage of graduates completing the recommended credits in core courses increased more for students whose parents had only completed high school than for students whose parents had completed college effectively closing the gap between the two groups. One table and two graphs summarize this information by gender, race and ethnicity, urbanicity, type of school, and parental education level. (SLD)

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INDICATOR OF THE MONTH, JUNE 1994

HIGH SCHOOL COURSE TAKING IN THE CORE SUBJECT AREAS

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INDICATOR OF THE MONTH

NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS

June 1994

High school course taking in the core subject areas

In 1983, A Nation at Risk *claimed that our society had "lost sight of the basic purpose of schooling, and of high expectations and disciplined effort needed to attain them." As a remedial step, the report recommended that all students seeking a diploma be required to enroll in the "New Basics", a core curriculum composed of 4 units of English, 3 units of science, 3 units of social studies, 3 units of mathematics, and 0.5 units of computer science.*

- **Between 1982 and 1992, the percentage of high school graduates earning the recommended units in core courses* increased sharply, from 13 to 47 percent. This increase was broadly based, occurring for both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups.**
- **For private school graduates the percentage earning the recommended units increased from 17 to 66 percent (49 percentage points) compared to an increase from 12 to 45 percent (33 percentage points) for public school graduates.**
- **Over the same period, the percentage of graduates completing the recommended credits in core courses increased more for students whose parents had only completed high school (about 36 percentage points) than for students whose parents had completed college (29 percentage points), effectively closing the gap between the two groups.**

Percentage of high school graduates who earned the recommended* units in core courses, by selected student characteristics: 1982, 1987, 1990, and 1992

					Percentage point change			
Characteristic	1982	1987	1990	1992	1982–87	1987–90	1990–92	1982–92
Total	12.7	28.6	39.9	46.8	15.9	11.3	6.9	34.1
Sex								
Male	13.7	30.1	40.6	46.5	16.5	10.5	5.9	32.8
Female	11.8	27.2	39.2	47.2	15.4	12.0	8.0	35.4
Race/ethnicity								
White	13.8	29.7	40.6	48.5	15.9	10.9	7.9	34.7
Black	10.8	24.4	41.3	43.7	13.6	16.9	2.4	32.9
Hispanic	6.7	17.9	32.7	36.0	11.2	14.8	3.3	29.3
Asian	19.8	48.3	51.2	50.7	28.5	2.9	-0.5	30.9
American Indian	6.0	28.9	26.0	30.6	22.9	-2.9	4.6	24.6
Urbanicity								
Urban	12.9	—	—	50.8	—	—	—	37.9
Suburban	13.2	—	—	47.6	—	—	—	34.4
Rural	11.7	—	—	42.5	—	—	—	30.8
Control of school								
Public	11.5	27.1	38.2	44.8	15.6	11.1	6.6	33.3
Private	17.1	42.4	56.6	65.7	25.3	14.2	9.1	48.6
Parents' highest education level								
Didn't finish high school	10.0	—	—	45.3	—	—	—	35.3
High school graduate	10.7	—	—	47.2	—	—	—	36.5
Some college	14.8	—	—	45.7	—	—	—	30.9
College graduate	19.5	—	—	48.5	—	—	—	29.0

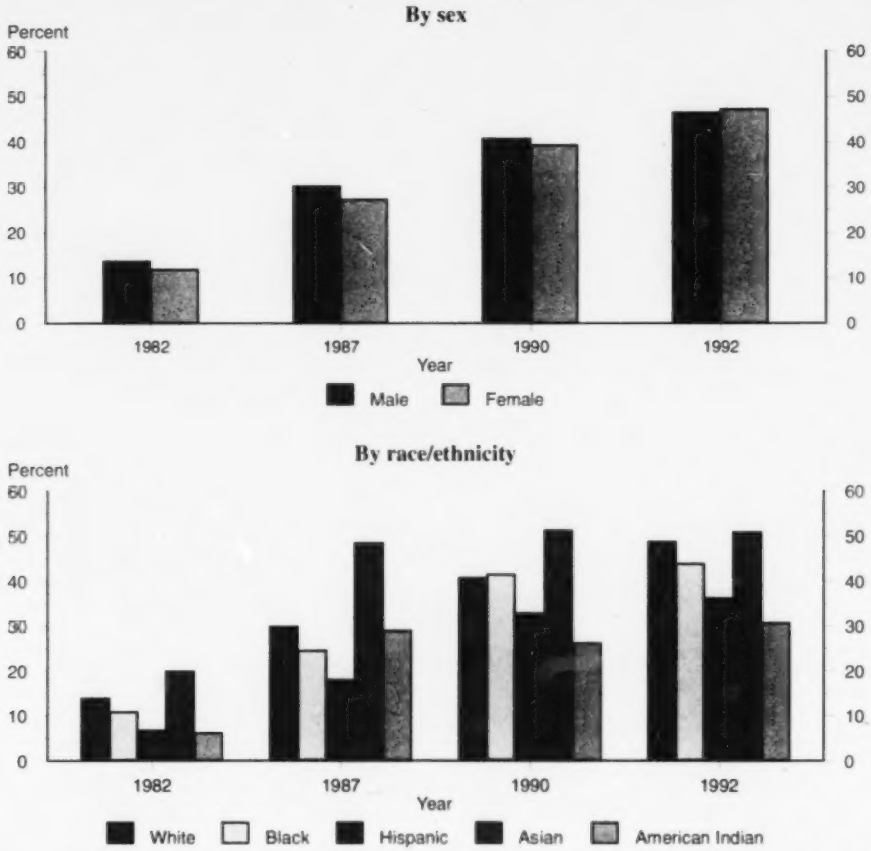
—Not available.

*The panel's recommendation of 0.5 units of computer science was not included here.

NOTE: Because urbanicity categories are not comparable across data sources, percentage point changes could not be calculated for all years.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, High School and Beyond Transcript Study, 1987 and 1990 NAEP High School Transcript Studies, National Education Longitudinal Study Transcripts, 1992.

Percentage of high school graduates who earned the recommended units* in core courses: 1982, 1987, 1990, and 1992



*The graph shows the recommended 4 units of English, 3 units of science, 3 units of social studies, 3 units of mathematics, but does not include the recommended one-half year of computer science.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, High School and Beyond Transcript Study, 1987 and 1990 NAEP High School Transcript Studies, National Education Longitudinal Study Transcripts, 1992.

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